

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BAGHDA 00958 060828Z
ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 ARA-10 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01
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INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI
USINT HAVANA
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 0958

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, MASS, ET, CU, IZ
SUBJECT: ERITREANS VISIT BAGHDAD AS VICE PRESIDENT
MEETS IN HAVANA

REF: (A) BAGHDAD 784, (B) BAGHDAD 931, (C) BAGHDAD 350,
(D) BAGHDAD 899.

1. SUMMARY: VISITS TO BAGHDAD BY ERITREAN LEADERS AT MOMENT
OF HIGH LEVEL IRAQI-CUBAN TALKS IN HAVANA UNDERLINE DILEMMA
OF IRAQI POLICY TOWARD HORN. WE BELIEVE IRAQ WILL TRY TO
MAINTAIN TIES TO BOTH SIDES. END SUMMARY.

2. WHILE IRAQI MEDIA WERE FOCUSING ON VISIT TO HAVANA OF
VICE PRESIDENT MAAROUF (REF D), TWO ERITREAN LEADERS ARRIVED
IN BAGHDAD WITHOUT FANFARE. AHMED NASSER, CHAIRMAN OF THE
ERITREAN LIBERATION FRONT, ARRIVED APRIL 29. IRAQ NEWS
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PAGE 02 BAGHDA 00958 060828Z

AGENCY QUOTES HIM AS PRAISING IRAQI SUPPORT FOR
ERITREAN REVOLUTION, BUT ONLY IN MOST GENERAL TERMS. NASSER
IS PROBABLY STILL IN BAGHDAD, AND SECRET TALKS ON MILITARY
ASSISTANCE MAY BE UNDERWAY. ATTENTION HE RECEIVED ON HIS
LAST TRIP TO BAGHDAD (REF C) SUGGESTED THAT IRAQ ACCORDED
HIM MORE IMPORTANCE THAN OTHER ERITREAN LEADERS.

3. IRAQ MAY ALSO BE CONTRIBUTING TO ARAB EFFORTS TO UNIFY ERITREAN GROUPS. ARRIVAL MAY 3 OF MUHAMMED SAID NADAT OF THE ELF-POPULAR LIBERATION FORCES, COULD FIT SUCH A SCENARIO. ELF-PLF LEADER OSMAN SALEH SABBE IS THOUGHT TO HAVE SLIPPED IN BAGHDAD'S ESTEEM, BUT HE STILL ENJOYS SOME SUPPORT FROM BAATH PARTY NATIONAL COMMAND, OFFICIAL HOSTS FOR NADAT'S VISIT AND PROBABLY FOR AHMED NASSER'S AS WELL.

4. MEANWHILE, PRESS IS FULL OF RITUAL PRAISE FOR CUBAN-IRAQI TIES. ONLY STRAIGHTFORWARD REFERENCE TO CONTENTIOUS ISSUE OF HORN IS SINGLE LINE IN INA REPORTAGE ON VICE PRESIDENT MAAROUF'S TALKS SAYING, "THE TWO SIDES REVIEWED THEIR VIEWPOINTS CONCERNING THE SITUATION IN THE HORN OF AFRICA." SAME REPORT ALSO NOTES THAT MAAROUF STRESSED IRAQ'S CLEARCUT ATTITUDE TOWARD NATIONAL LIBERATION MOVEMENTS IN AFRICA.

5. A CUBAN TRADE DELEGATION IS ALSO CURRENTLY VISITING BAGHDAD. BY SEPTTEL, USINT IS REPORTING ON IRAQI-CUBAN TRADE RELATIONS. WHILE OF MUCH LESSER IMPORTANCE THAN POLITICAL TIES, THEY DO INDICATE IRAQ'S WILLINGNESS TO EXPAND ITS DEALINGS WITH CUBA.

6. COMMENT: IRAQI INFORMATION AND FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS SHOW CONSIDERABLE EMBARRASSMENT IN DEALING WITH ISSUES INVOLVING THE HORN. AS ANALYZED IN REFS A AND B, IRAQ HAS AN IDEOLOGICAL COMMITMENT TO ERITREANS AND MAY ALSO HAVE

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 BAGHDA 00958 060828Z

BEGUN TO APPRECIATE OMINOUS IMPLICATIONS OF A SOVIET PRESENCE ON THE RED SEA. NONETHELESS, THE SOVIET UNION PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN IRAQI SECURITY, AND CUBA IS A KEY IRAQI ALLY IN THE RADICAL WING OF THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT. FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL RECENTLY TOLD BRITISH DIPLOMAT THAT HIS COLLEAGUES HAD BEEN PROMISED A HIGH-LEVEL BRIEFING ON IRAQI POLICY TOWARD THE HORN. UNTIL HE GOT HIS MARCHING ORDERS, HOWEVER, THE OFFICIAL SAID HE WOULD REMAIN RELUCTANT TO DISCUSS THE ISSUE.

7. WE BELIEVE THAT IRAQ WILL CONTINUE ITS BALANCING ACT. FOR AS LONG AS CUBAN TROOPS ARE NOT KNOWN TO BE INVOLVED IN A COMBAT ROLE IN ERITREA, IT WILL BE FEASIBLE FOR IRAQ TO MAINTAIN A PUBLIC SHOW OF SOLIDARITY WITH CUBA WHILE PROVIDING THE ERITREANS WITH CONTINUED MILITARY AID. IRAQIS ARE PROBABLY ALSO HOPING THAT CUBANS WILL BRING THEIR ETHIOPIAN FRIENDS (AND SOVIET ALLIES) AROUND TO THE KIND OF NEGOTIATED DEAL ACCEPTABLE TO ERITREAN LEADERS.

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